DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 644 CS 010 666

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TITLE Improving Reading Comprehension of Underprepared College Students.
PUB DATE Dec 90
NOTE 73p.; M.S. Practicum, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; Community Colleges; Critical Reading; Developmental Studies Programs; *Learning Processes; Memory; Metacognition; *Reading Comprehension; Reading Research; *Reading Strategies; *Remedial Reading; Self Evaluation (Individuals); Skill Development; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS Florida

ABSTRACT

A practicum was designed to improve reading comprehension of 10 basic skills college students by providing training using 5 specific strategies and techniques. Five specific strategies based on a review of the literature were selected: (1) metacognitive awareness; (2) discussion; (3) self-monitoring charts; (4) use of pictures as an introduction to critical reading skills; and (5) use of memory processes. To evaluate the success of the program, the following instruments were administered at the beginning and end of the program: a reading performance chart, a student self-perception survey, a student self-monitoring chart, a memory checklist, and pre and post standardized tests. Specific goals were to improve students' attitudes toward reading, to improve skills in four critical reading areas, to increase the amount of time spent in reading for pleasure, and to improve their grades in reading comprehension. The results of the practicum were positive. Analysis of the data revealed that students in the target group improved their reading comprehension and their attitude towards reading. Gains were made by students for each objective that was measured. Students involved in the practicum scored high enough on post-test scores to permit them to enter college-level courses. (Fourteen references and 14 appendixes of the evaluative instruments and practicum materials are attached.) (Author/PRA)

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# IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION OF UNDERPREPARED COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Irma Darrow Doughty

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CS010666

A Practicum Report

Submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the Advancement of Education at Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Reading.

The abstract of this report may be placed in a National Database System for reference.

December/1990



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**ABSTRACT**

Improving Reading Comprehension of Basic College Students. Doughty, Irma Darrow, 1990: Practicum Report, Nova University, The Center for the Advancement of Education. Descriptors: Reading Comprehension/Reading Processes/Reading Strategies/Critical Reading.

This practicum was designed to improve reading comprehension of basic skills college students by providing training using five specific strategies and techniques. This writer selected the following five strategies based on a review of the literature: (a) metacognitive awareness, (b) discussion, (c) self-monitoring charts, (d) use of pictures as an introduction to critical reading skills, and (e) use of memory processes. To evaluate the success of the program, the following instruments were administered at the beginning and at the end of the program: a reading performance chart, a student self-perception survey, a student self-monitoring chart, a memory checklist, pre and post standardized tests. Specific goals were to improve students' attitudes toward reading, to improve skills in four critical reading areas, to increase the amount of time spent in reading for pleasure, and to improve their grades in reading comprehension. The results of this practicum were positive. Analysis of the data revealed that students in the target group improved their reading comprehension and their attitude towards reading. Gains were made by students for each objective that was measured. Students involved in this practicum scored high enough on posttest scores to permit them to enter college-level courses.

## Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. When it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other professionals in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

Signed_____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Acknowledgement . . . . . i

Title Page . . . . . ii

Abstract . . . . . iii

Authorship Statement . . . . . iv

Table of Contents . . . . . v

Chapters

I. Purpose . . . . . .1

II. Research and Solution Strategy . . . . . 8

III. Method . . . . . .17

IV. Results . . . . . 25

V. Recommendations . . . . . 29

Reference List . . . . . .32

Appendices

Appendix A: Student Reading Attitude Survey . . . . .34

Appendix B: Self-Assessment of Course-Related Skills 36

Appendix C: Principles of Memory . . . . . 38

Appendix D: Memory Checklist . . . . . 41

Appendix E: Improving Your Ability to Concentrate . .43

Appendix F: How to be an Active Reader . . . . . 46

Appendix G: Sample Mastery Tests - Inference . . . . 48

Appendix H: Strategy Definition Sheet . . . . . .50

Appendix I: Record of Strategies Used . . . . . .52

**Appendices (continued)**

Page

Appendix J: Reading Performance Chart . . . . . .54

Appendix K: Sample Mastery Test - Fact and Opinion . . 56

Appendix L: Student Self-Perception Survey . . . . . 58

Appendix M: Sample Mastery Test - Bias and Propaganda .60

Appendix N: Sample Mastery Test - Purpose and Tone . . 64

# CHAPTER I

## Purpose

Founded 30 years ago, this two-year community college is one of the largest in the southeastern portion of the United States. Since its beginning, the college has been distinguished by its unusual programs in a variety of fields, including an occupational degree and certificated program, whose variety of choices is to provide alternate forms of education for the citizens who live in the community. The ever-changing and rapidly growing community and surrounding areas combined with growth in business, industrial, electronics, and computer opportunities has provided direction for the college and its expansion.

Originally planned as one campus, the growth of the area has contributed to its becoming a multi-campus college with many outreach centers. Although the main campus originated in a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood, the changing community has become a predominantly black, underprivileged socioeconomic population. This accounts for the college's high percentage of black students receiving financial aid. The outreach center where this project took place is in the heart of an area with a Hispanic population. It was created to encourage people to obtain an education without having to leave their community. It originated as an office building but was immediately converted to classrooms to accommodate approximately three thousand day and evening

students. The majority of classes are English as a second language, basic skills classes in reading and writing, and some classes in mathematics and accounting. There is the anticipation that when these students complete their studies at this center, they will continue their education at the main campus to obtain an Associate Arts or Science Degree and then continue on to a four year institution.

The students who attend classes at this center live in the neighboring areas. They all are of Hispanic backgrounds and enter classes with a minimum of English language skills which is exacerbated by the fact that little or no English is spoken in the home. The homes in the area are modest, well-kept, and most have been renovated. There are many houses with iron gates on the windows and doors used for protection because of a high crime rate. There is also an abundance of apartment rentals and condominiums in the area. The population is lower middle-class and comprised of blue collar workers. Most families have two people working within the household. A large portion of the students are employed and are older than the traditional undergraduate. Many of these students have families.

This writer has been teaching since 1976 at the aforementioned college and has a Masters Degree in Reading. This writer teaches developmental reading, advanced reading, study skills, and a preparation class to help students who will take the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST). The basic skills reading classes at the center meet two times

per week for a total of four hours during the twelve weeks of the Spring-Summer semester, the period in which this practicum was administered. The difficulties encountered teaching at the outreach center have been; the lack of a reading laboratory, thin walls between classrooms causing a high noise level, late student registrations, the lack of a library within the facility and the lack of adequate teaching materials. The instructor had to plan well in advance to be sure to have a sufficient supply of materials and books available for the students. There was a lack of audiovisual equipment to enhance or contribute to the effectiveness of the reading program. A major problem that developed at this time was that the enrollment was increasing and the lack of classroom space was quite evident. Large class enrollment was the result at the present time. Hopefully, a new facility will be sought in the near future to accommodate not only the increasing numbers of students desiring a college education, but the need for a library, skill laboratories to enhance the courses offered, and a bookstore. The dedicated and hard-working students create an atmosphere conducive to teaching inspite of the inadequacy of the facility. This dedication of the students and the strategies that were used during the implementation of this practicum were the motivating forces thereby increasing the students' reading comprehension skills.

The problem concerned 10 college students whose reading comprehension levels were 2 years and 2 months below the

level needed to enter regular college courses. It was noted in classroom discussions that these students lacked the skills required to think in a clear and logical way. These problems were magnified and intensified when the students were deficient in reading and writing in English. The reason this problem existed was that in their homes, their native language was often spoken, foreign language newspapers, magazines, and books were read, as well as television which was watched in the native language. The students were unable to practice their skills at home.

Another common problem these college students were facing was learning and remembering the vast amount of information that they were required to read. The reading skills needed for success in college were substantially higher from those needed in the secondary schools. It was noted from observation in the classroom that these students were unable to make inferences or draw conclusions about the material they had read. They were unable to answer many of the comprehension questions that followed a selected reading passage from their text or a magazine. As a result these students disliked to read and read as little as possible.

One cause for students' poor reading comprehension was a lack of confidence in their own ability thereby creating their anxiety. In addition, these students were unable to learn by themselves and relied on the instructor for support and information to help them move ahead.

Students involved in this practicum scored well below

the minimum standard of 12 on the Florida MAPS test which is required by State Guidelines. These students' median reading comprehension grade equivalency level was 7.9 as documented by a timed Nelson-Denny Standardized Test which was administered during the first week of the 12 week semester. The minimum acceptable grade level is 10.1 on the Nelson-Denny Test in reading comprehension. The students in the target group were performing below the required minimum standard by two years and two months.

Students involved in this practicum were given an untimed standardized test called Degree of Reading Power (DRP). A score of 65 would permit a student to enter college level courses as determined by Basic Skills Department Policy Guidelines. The purpose of this test was to see if scores would indicate a higher competency for the students because the pressure of a timed test was removed. The results of this test showed that 1 student scored 53, 2 scored 54, 4 scored 56, and 3 scored 60. This data revealed a deficiency in reading for all 10 students as did the Nelson-Denny and MAPS test scores. In view of the above cited documentation it was determined that these students needed specific strategies and techniques to help them improve their reading comprehension.

It was the intent of this project to take the target students in the basic skills reading class who were performing at 7.9 grade level and have them increase their reading comprehension skills to a minimum of 10.1 grade level

so as to close the two year and two month gap by the end of the semester of 12 weeks.

The major goal projected for this practicum was the improvement of reading comprehension of the target group of 10 students in basic skills reading classes in college. Additional goals were to improve: (a) speed in reading selected paragraphs, and (b) students' positive attitudes toward reading.

Over a period of 12 weeks of this practicum seven out of 10 students in the basic skills reading class would be expected to:

1. Increase their knowledge of critical reading skills to a minimum of 80% in each skill as measured by a teacher-made Reading Performance Chart (Appendix J: Page 54) on inferences, fact and opinion, purpose and tone, and bias and propaganda using a variety of teacher-designed metacognitive reading strategies.

2. Raise their reading comprehension grades by two years and two months on the Nelson-Denny Reading Comprehension posttest and by six points from a mean score of 56 to a mean score of 64 on the DRP posttest.

3. Improve their reading speed by completing one more reading selection on the timed Nelson-Denny Reading Comprehension posttest by using a teacher-made Memory Checklist (Appendix D: Page 41) prior to reading. This would alleviate the necessity for rereading passages repeatedly and thereby increase their speed.

4. Develop a more positive attitude toward reading by increasing the amount of time they read for pleasure by 30 minutes per day as shown on a Student Self-Perception Survey (Appendix L: Page 58).

In conclusion, it was the intent of this practicum to show that the combination of selected strategies and techniques used during the implementation period would produce positive results for each objective stated.

## CHAPTER II

## Research and Solution Strategy

Many instructional theories, methods, and systems have come from the research done in education. In the field of education for students with reading comprehension difficulties, there was also considerable research literature. Though educational research was frequently inconclusive and often contradictory, much of considerable value was learned from its study. In the past 10 years, there appeared in many reading journals and articles, a great number of suggestions related to specific strategies towards improving reading comprehension through internal dialogue called metacognition. This writer was involved in an attempt to select appropriate strategies for the 10 basic skills college students in order for them to increase their skills enough to permit them to enter college level courses.

The ability to read with good comprehension was probably the most important skill people could possess. In order to be a functioning human being; that is, to be able to fill out an application for employment, to read instructions on boxes of food for preparation, and to have the skills to understand the driver's manual, people must understand what they have read.

Definitions of reading could be divided according to whether the decoding or comprehension aspects of reading were emphasized. The broader definition was that "reading was thinking guided by print" (Kami, 1989, p. 309). Reading

ability defined in this way was associated with the skills in comprehending texts.

Metacognition referred to "one's knowledge and control of one's cognitive system" (Brown, 1987, pp. 3-5). Brown elaborated that metacognitive abilities have been associated with several aspects of reading, including:

> establishing the purpose for reading, identifying important ideas, activating prior knowledge, evaluating the text for clarity, compensating for failures to understand, and assessing one's level of comprehension.

Brown also added that it was not clear whether all or just certain aspects of these activities were metacognitive.

The use of strategies to facilitate reading comprehension has been well documented (Brown & Campione, 1984; Kami, 1989). There were several kinds of strategies an individual might use to facilitate comprehension such as taking notes, underlining selected sentences in the text, or oral repetition.

The ability of students to monitor their own comprehension played an important role in improving their reading comprehension (Dollaghan & Kastor, 1986). They suggested that students should keep a record of their own performance by identifying grades of individual mastery tests of the skills they were learning. By doing so, students would be able to recognize which skills needed additional study or assistance from their instructor. It would also assist them in recognizing their progress and thereby increasing their self-confidence. They went on to explain

that individuals who are adept at monitoring their comprehension are more proficient at understanding what they read.

Effective readers approached reading by carrying on an inner conversation which helped them understand what they had read. Readers who were metacognitive were aware of what they knew and could do, and applied these insights while they read and learned. In an article by Buehe, Cook, Ehlert, & Vance, (1989) they suggested that using metacognitive awareness gave the students the skills they needed to continually try making sense out of what they read, and these students knew how to "switch gears" and alter their reading strategies when the learning broke down.

These metacognitive abilities would be said to be the control center in our mind that directs our efforts while we learn. McNeil in Reading Comprehension: New Directions for Classroom Practice (Scott, Foresman, 1984) described metacognitive abilities as focusing on three areas essential to learning; self knowledge, task knowledge, and self-monitoring.

Philips and Sotiriou (1982) used the strategy of prereading as a procedure that allowed a reader to become familiar with any type of material before reading it. Research has documented its value in improving reading efficiency, and its worth has been further attested to by its inclusion in nearly all of the reading study systems published in the past 30 years.

An excellent way to introduce the topic of inferences and ease students into making them quickly was through the use of pictures. McWhorter (1986) explained that through the use of magazine or newspaper photographs, when a question was presented to the students, they could explain what was happening in the pictures. This resulted in the students making inferences or drawing conclusions. Then by asking them how or why they responded as they did, could lead directly into a discussion of inferences. Material of this kind usually involves inferences, assumptions, bias, and unstated messages and could lead to discussions of many critical reading skills.

The encouragement of students to make predictions based on headings was also a technique for reading beyond the paragraph (Flemming, 1990). This technique was of value to students when they tried to comprehend the unstated main ideas. In addition, it aided the students in identifying major and minor supporting details of a passage.

Discussion was important both as a communication skill and as a means for developing higher level reading skills. As a teaching method, discussion has been considered as "the cornerstone of oral language work" (Corson, 1984, p. 105). Discussion offers teachers one of the new teaching and learning alternatives to the straight lecture method. Within the past 10 years some research on discussion has begun to appear. This research was supplemented by more literature on

discussion that included opinions and recommended practices, the kind generally found in method's texts and practitioner's journals.

Reasons varied for believing that discussion played an important role in helping students comprehend reading assignments. Meanings shared in discussion groups were not merely a collection of individual meanings; "they are part of new sets of meaning developed as students talk and listen to one another" (Pinnell, 1984, p. 250). Teachers who used discussion created a learning opportunity that encouraged students to "enrich and refine the understandings they have derived from their initial readings" (Bridges, 1985, p. 4).

Another technique for boosting students' self-reliance involved assignments made by the teacher for additional readings. By encouraging students to read other printed material (eg. newspapers, magazines) the teacher was able to create an environment for discussion in which comparing and contrasting sources, noting different points of view, and determining the writer's purpose developed among the students.

Text-based discussions offered numerous opportunities for the instructor to foster critical thinking. For example, through classroom discussion the teacher demonstrated examples of biases, assumptions, and organizational patterns made by the author.

The information cited above documented that students needed to learn appropriate strategies and techniques in

order to improve their reading comprehension. It was indicated that the students who were poor readers and did not comprehend what they read needed a program which included appropriate strategies and techniques in order for them to improve their comprehension.

Results of studies designed to teach students to use individual study methods have been somewhat disappointing. One reason was that requiring students to use particular study methods may have interfered with what students were already doing effectively.

For example, in a study by Howe and Singer (1985), subjects assigned to the read-only group had better recall than copying or summarizing groups. The researchers' explanation was that those who were in the read-only group were allowed the most freedom to use whatever strategies they found effective. Many of these strategies involved processes that were not readily observable. These included rereading selected material, mentally paraphrasing it, developing a mental "map" of the text, and integrating new information with background knowledge, and using imagery.

Another reason that strategy training was often unsuccessful was that it had not included metacognitive knowledge about the utility of the strategy, as well as, when and where to use it. Only by including these components in strategy instruction were skills maintained and transferred to new learning situations.

It was as a result of studying the research that this

writer felt that developing metacognitive awareness was an essential component in effective strategy instruction. By knowing what to study, which methods were best to study the material, and evaluating whether it was learned could the students become effective and efficient learners.

Another strategy that was implemented by this instructor as suggested by Alvermann, Dillon, & O'Brien (1988) was discussion. Discussion was important both as a communication skill and as the foundation for developing high level reading skills. For effective usage, students were encouraged to put forth multiple points of view and to stand ready to change their mind about the matter under discussion. Students were also encouraged to interact with one another as well as with the teacher. Instructional purposes for using the discussion method included subject mastery, attitude change, and problem solving. According to Alvermann, et al, in contrast, recitations primarily served this instructional objective: rapid fire questioning and answering with an orientation toward factual or knowledge level learning. Although the recitation method has remained popular through the years, information from current research suggested the need to promote the use of discussion.

According to Dollaghan & Kastor (1986) the ability of the students to monitor their own reading comprehension played an important role in improving comprehension. Individuals who were adept at monitoring their comprehension were more proficient at understanding what they had read. A

teacher made Reading Performance Chart (Appendix J: Page 54) assisted the students in self-monitoring their growth in individual subskills.

Students had great difficulties answering questions related to critical reading skills because they could not readily locate the answers in the text. McWhorter (1986) explained that an excellent way to introduce the topic of inference and ease students into making them quickly was through the use of pictures. It was also an excellent way of introducing propaganda techniques and unstated main ideas or messages.

Another strategy that was indicated by Kami (1989) was through the use of the memory processes. The author stated that the complexity and diversity of memory processes precluded simple conclusions about the relationship between reading and memory. Memory processes were involved not only in word recognition, but also in higher-level comprehension processes. Additionally, he has suggested that at least three factors influenced these processes: (1) basic processing operation and capacities, (2) the richness and relevance of the knowledge base, and (3) control strategies. This strategy was incorporated by the use of a teacher-made Principles of Memory device (Appendix C: Page 38) followed by a Memory Checklist (Appendix D: Page 41).

In conclusion, the combination of these five strategies seemed appropriate and were used in this practicum: (1) metacognitive awareness, (2) discussion prior to and

following reading, (3) self-monitoring reading comprehension skills, (4) use of pictures for inference skill development, and (5) use of memory processes.

The use of the combination of these five strategies were justified because they have been most frequently cited in the literature as effective for the post-secondary student. Some studies have employed one strategy, but this writer has implemented a combination of five strategies. There was experimental support for the effectiveness of each of these strategies in raising post-secondary students' comprehension levels. It was this writer's contention that the use of multiple strategies would have a positive effect in producing desired increases in reading comprehension.

## CHAPTER III

## Method

It was the decision of this writer to use a combination of five strategies; (1) metacognitive awareness, (2) discussion prior to and following reading, (3) self-monitoring of reading comprehension skills, (4) use of pictures for inference skill development, and (5) use of memory processes because they have been the most effective in directing the post-secondary and second-language English speaking students to become skilled and independent learners, as indicated in much of the literature reviewed.

Weeks 1 and 2

A Student Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix A: Page 34) and a Self-Assessment of Course Related Skills (Appendix B: Page 36) was administered followed by a discussion with the students about their difficulty to concentrate while they read and their failure to remember what they read. An activity by the target group in which they successfully remembered the names of all the students in the class demonstrated the use of Principles of Memory (Appendix C: Page 38). This was accomplished through a Round-robin method. A Memory Checklist (Appendix D: Page 41) was distributed to the students to use each time they completed their reading assignments.

During the first two weeks of implementation which consisted of two one-hour class meetings per week the memory training techniques were put to use while studying vocabulary

in context. The students could learn and understand the vocabulary quicker and easier now that they had experience and confidence in memory training and increased their ability to remember. The entire sessions for the first week were dedicated to this skill. Utilizing the same method, the entire second week was spent in understanding the main ideas of passages.

Weeks 3 and 4

After a discussion with the students on the subject of concentration exhausting all possible theories which included learning how to reduce distractions and ideas on focusing attention on the subject, setting goals, and rewarding yourself when achievement is completed, a teacher-made handout Improving Your Ability to Concentrate (Appendix E: Page 43) was distributed to the students.

Several attempts of passage reading from the text were made and a discussion of metacognitive awareness and the meaning of same was initiated by the instructor along with the distribution of How to be an Active Reader (Appendix F: Page 46). The use of metacognitive strategies during the reading of sample passages were modeled in an effort to increase comprehension following each passage and the ability of the students to remember what they had read without having to reread the passage repeatedly. Additionally, there were practice demonstrations by the target group showing evidence that the use of this strategy would aid their ability to concentrate on their task. The entire four hours were used

for developing a thorough understanding on how to differentiate the main ideas from the supporting details. Students were asked to read aloud and discussions would follow.

Weeks 5 and 6

Record of Reading Strategies Used (Appendix I: Page 52) and Reading Performance Chart (Appendix J: Page 54) were given to each student. A review of the reasons for utilizing these charts were discussed by all involved in the class. It was felt by this writer that instructors who develop learning strategies through their instructional planning play a critical role in creating independent learners. Through modeling and coaching, teachers will be able to gradually transfer more and more of the responsibility of learning to their students. This was followed by a discussion of study skills and how, through the use of specific study methods including highlighting, outlining, and skimming and scanning, their understanding of reading would be enhanced. A Strategy Definition Sheet (Appendix H: Page 50) was distributed and reviewed. A discussion, explanation, and practice exercise of each strategy was done. Each student was asked to keep a checklist each time they read at home from their text. They were asked to use whatever strategy seemed appropriate or felt useful for them. The entire four hours in this two week period was spent on practicing the above skills.

Weeks 7 and 8

The ability to interpret, evaluate, and apply what one

reads to real-life situations are essential for an active, mature reader. A vital aspect to the development of an efficient and flexible reader is the acquisition of critical reading skills.

As an introduction to critical reading skills, the fifth strategy, namely, the use of pictures for inference skill development was begun for the first session, during the seventh week. As indicated in techniques by several educators in the literature review, a very effective way to introduce the topic of inferences and ease students into making them readily was through the use of pictures. Students were each asked to bring in five newspaper or magazine photographs that expressed action or emotion. The students were asked to describe what was happening or how the person in the photograph felt. In order that this task be accomplished, the students explained the inference or was asked to "read into" the picture. Through the use of class discussion, the students were able to explain how or why they responded as they did. This produced a discussion on inferences and drawing conclusions. Students were asked to bring five pictures to class and to write their inferences about their own pictures. All pictures and inferences were discussed with the students. This was accomplished in the two hours during the eighth week of class.

Weeks 9 and 10

Practice and encouragement of active learning was continued through the use of all five learning strategies on

inferences, fact and opinion, purpose and tone, and bias and propaganda with control of comprehension improvement monitored through the use of a self-performance chart. Recognizing that the student motivation was crucial to learning, this instructor encouraged students to select outside readings to add to their new-found skills in reading. Students were guided to select material which was challenging and interesting to them. They were asked to bring in their books for reading level assessment by the instructor. Students were instructed to avoid complicated readings in order for them to meet with success. The practice of the four critical reading skills and the practice of reading selected stories in the text including answering all questions following the stories were completed as follows:

1. in-chapter exercises on inferences, fact and opinion purpose and tone, and bias and propaganda
2. exercises based on pre-determined reading selections included in the text
3. exercises using students' own reading materials

The in-chapter exercises were constructed to provide immediate practice and allowed the student to test a skill as it was being taught. These exercises gave the student immediate feedback on the various techniques and skills. The exercises based on reading selections encouraged students to integrate the skills taught in the chapter. In these exercises, students were given the opportunity to apply techniques to materials specifically chosen to be appropriate

for the skill applied. The students were continually encouraged and reminded to utilize the new strategies as appropriate to the selection. In this manner students were guided to experience initial success with each technique. The third type of exercise permitted the student to apply techniques to various types of material that they have read. These exercises emphasized the need to apply skills that were taught in this practicum to everyday reading situations. Four hours of the ninth and tenth week were exhausted for these activities.

Monitoring

Weeks 11 and 12

The last two weeks or four hours of the semester were devoted to monitoring and measurement of the objectives to determine the success of this practicum. It was administered in the following manner:

1. Mastery tests on inferences, fact and opinion, bias and propaganda, and purpose and tone. (Appendices G, K, M, and N: Pages 48, 56, 60, and 64) to determine if seven out of 10 students increased their critical reading skills to a minimum of 80%.

2. Nelson-Denny Comprehension Test to determine if seven out of 10 students in the target group raised their grades by two years and two months and a DRP test to see if these students raised their mean score to 64.

3. The Nelson-Denny pre and posttests were compared to determine if seven out of 10 students increased their speed

by completing one additional reading passage. 4. The pre and post Student Self-Perception Survey (Appendix L: Page 58) were compared to determine if seven out of 10 students increased their pleasure reading time by 30 minutes per day. This was accomplished during the entire last four hours of class.

Evaluation

The purpose of this practicum was to raise the reading comprehension levels in the target group of 10 students in a period of 12 weeks so that they would be able to take college-level courses the following semester. The evaluation tools that were used by the writer were:

1. A pretest and posttest for knowledge of critical reading skills. Seven out of 10 students were to show a minimum of 80% as measured on a teacher-made Reading Performance Chart (Appendix J: Page 54) in inferences, fact and opinion, purpose and tone, and bias and propaganda. The test on these skills consisted of 10 multiple choice questions.

2. Comparison of pre and post Nelson-Denny Test scores to determine if the reading comprehension levels of seven out of 10 students were raised by two years and two months on a timed test and a comparison of Degrees of Reading Power pre and posttest were to determine that the mean comprehension levels of students in the target group were raised by six points.

3. Comparison of pre and post Nelson-Denny tests to

determine if seven out of 10 student's reading speed was raised by reading one more selection and answering the questions on the timed test. A Record of Reading Strategies Used chart (Appendix I: Page 52) were given before and after training to determine the extent to which students actually used the strategies taught while reading text passages.

4. A comparison of pre and post responses of students' improved attitude towards reading as indicated on a Student Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix A: Page 34). This attitude questionnaire consisted of 10 questions and used a Likert-type scale for responses. This survey was selected because students' motivation and attitude towards reading might have been related positively to improved academic success.

5. A pre and post Student Self-Perception Survey (Appendix L: Page 58) used to measure students' pleasure reading by showing an increase of reading for pleasure by 30 minutes per day in seven out of 10 students. Students were asked five questions and used a Likert-type scale to determine that after increasing their ability to comprehend what they read, they had increased the amount of time they read for pleasure.

CHAPTER IV

Results

**Objective 1: Improvement in Knowledge of Four Critical Reading Skills**

The results of pretest and posttests for knowledge of four critical reading skills were as follows:

On the pretests of inference, fact and opinion, purpose and tone, and bias and propaganda not one of the 10 students in the target group scored higher than 50%.

The results of posttests showed all 10 students received at least 80% on all four critical reading mastery tests indicating a significant increase in knowledge when developing learning strategies and keeping a record of their performance.

**Objective 2: Reading Comprehension Grades**

One of the objectives of the practicum was to raise students' reading comprehension grades by two years and two months on a timed test. The results were as follows: 1 student received an increase of 2 years and 1 month at the end relative to the beginning; 2 students showed an increase of 2 years and 4 months; and the following increases were shown by the other students: 3 years and 1 month, 3 years and 2 months, 3 years and 4 months, 4 years and 2 months, 4 years and 3 months, 4 years and 4 months, and 5 years and 5 months.

The second part of this objective was to raise the comprehension levels of students in the target group by six

points on an untimed DRP test. The results were as follows: 3 students received an increase of 10 points and 7 students received an increase of 8 points showing a significantly higher mean grade, relative to the beginning of the implementation period.

Thus all 10 students scored high enough on both the Nelson-Denny Comprehension Test and the DRP test to permit them to exit the basic skills class and enter college-level courses.

**Objective 3: Increased Speed in Reading**

Observation was made of the comparison of pre and post Nelson-Denny Comprehension tests to see if the reading speed was raised by reading one more selection and answering the questions on the timed test. All 10 students read one additional passage and answered the questions following the passage. Students used more reading strategies following training. These figures were calculated based on students' report of the reading strategies used during the reading of a test passage and observation by the author.

**Objective 4: Attitude Toward Reading**

As a result of examining an attitude questionnaire consisting of 10 questions about students' attitude toward reading before and after the course, all 10 students showed a significant attitudinal change toward reading and the fact that all 10 students indicated increased grades is significant when observing increased scores on posttests.

**Objective 5: Self-perceived Reading Ability**

The results of comparison of a pre and post self-perception survey showed that the difference between pre and posttest scores is statistically significant when students increased their self-perceived reading ability. All 10 students showed an increase of 30 minutes per day in reading for pleasure after increasing their ability to comprehend what they read.

In summary, the results of this practicum showed that the reading comprehension levels of the target group of college students improved significantly. The use of selected strategies and techniques during the implementation period of ten weeks produced positive results for each objective stated. The overall findings of the students involved in the target group improved their reading comprehension, increased their speed in reading, improved their attitude toward reading, and their self-perceived ability in reading.

It was this writer's conclusion that the combination of five strategies; (1) metacognitive awareness, (2) discussion prior to and following reading, (3) self-monitoring of reading comprehension skills, (4) use of pictures for inference skill development, and (5) use of memory processes were very effective in directing the post-secondary and second-language English students in becoming skilled and independent learners. This confirmed the expectations that following the implementation period students would use selected strategies and techniques to obtain the final

results of scores high enough to permit them to enter college-level courses.

The results of the teacher-made attitude survey lead to the conclusion that students did report a more positive attitude toward reading following the implementation period. It was expected that student attitude would improve following training due to student success with reading comprehension.

The conclusion can be made that students improved their own perceived reading ability as a result of the training of the selected strategies. Studies have shown that students' self-perception of reading ability is related to their level of achievement. It is possible that improvement in comprehension helped improve their self-perception and vice-versa in this practicum.

The general conclusion can be made that students in college-level basic skills classes improved their reading comprehension, rate of speed in reading, their attitude towards reading, and their self-perceived ability in reading. For the purpose of this practicum it can be stated that all objectives were met. The essential features of this practicum were the use of five selected strategies. It is important to note that the selected strategies were those most commonly found in recent literature for the improvement of reading comprehension, yet no study used a combination of these five strategies, although several prior studies had stressed that greater achievement could be facilitated using additional strategies in various combinations.

## CHAPTER V

## Recommendations

It has been determined that good readers are always making predictions about what is to come but are equally prepared to modify or affirm those predictions based on what follows in the text. All students should be given information as to how to become active readers, that is, to be given ideas as to what questions to ask while reading.

It should be emphasized to the students that it is important to avoid constant interruptions while reading. Many students think they are doing the right thing if they look up every unfamiliar word, not realizing that too many interruptions can sever their connection to the author's train of thought.

This writer feels that it would be beneficial for instructors to ask instructors in other disciplines to supply words that have one meaning in general conversation and another specialized meaning in their field; for example, root, property, and base. These word lists can then become part of vocabulary instruction.

Another strategy for the improvement of reading comprehension would be to encourage students to respond to opinions when they come across them in their reading and to agree or disagree with an author's thesis. When students are willing to participate with the author in a search for knowledge about an issue, it is this writer's belief that at those times real thinking and learning ta[illegible] place. Once

students realize that many valid opinions exist about certain issues, such as abortion, the environment, and the homeless, they can evaluate the opinions of all the sides and reach their own conclusions. The key point is that they are thinking for themselves and are not influenced or dominated by the thinking of anyone else.

The following recommendations are suggested by this writer:

1. Use a variety of manipulative devices to provide motivation to the students.

2. Coordinate classroom assignments with homework assignments to ensure the use of selected strategies at all times.

3. Stress the use of asking questions during the passage readings to enable students to recognize answers to questions.

4. Remind students how the use of mental pictures can aid in the memory process and how it can prevent the need for rereading of passages, thereby increasing their speed in which they can read passages.

5. Develop a reward system for students attending classes regularly.

The following plans will help disseminate the results of this practicum:

1. Share the results of this practicum with other faculty members and school administrators in the school.

2. Have a workshop with other faculty members to share strategies and ideas.

3. Submit a copy of the findings to the Florida Association of Community Colleges to share ideas among many reading faculty members from other community colleges across the state at the annual conventions and request time-slot for presentation of practicum.

4. Write a grant to receive additional funds for materials to aid this program.

5. Submit a short version or article about contents of the practicum to a professional journal.

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# APPENDIX A

## STUDENT READING ATTITUDE SURVEY

Name_____Seq.#_____Date_____

**Student Reading Attitude Survey**

**Directions:** Underline one response for each question.

1. When you were younger, did your parents read to you?

(a) Often (b) Sometimes (c) Rarely (d) Never

2. Do you enjoy reading in your native language?

(a) Very Much (b) Somewhat (c) Not Very Much (d) Not at All

3. Do you enjoy reading in English?

(a) Very Much (b) Somewhat (c) Not Very Much (d) Not at All

4. Do you read newspapers and magazines in English?

(a) Often (b) Sometimes (c) Rarely (d) Never

5. In addition to your class assignments, do you read for pleasure or interest?

(a) Often (b) Sometimes (c) Rarely (d) Never

6. How often do you visit a public or school library?

(a) Often (b) Sometimes (c) Rarely (d) Never

7. Do you take books out of the library and read them?

(a) Often (b) Sometimes (c) Rarely (d) Never

8. Would you rather watch television or go out with friends than read?

(a) Always (b) Most of the Time (c) Sometimes (d) Never

9. Do you consider yourself a person who enjoys learning?

(a) Very Much (b) Somewhat (c) Not so Much (d) Not at All

10. Would you select a college-level reading class as an elective subject?

(a) Definitely (b) Probably (c) I Doubt It (d) No Way!

# APPENDIX B

## SELF-ASSESSMENT OF COURSE RELATED-SKILLS

## Appendix B

### Self-Assessment of Course-Related Skills

**Directions:** Circle the letter that best represents your assessment of your skills and experience in the areas listed below.

N - No Skills/No Experience

B - Basic Skills/Very Little Experience

F - Functionally Adequate Skills/Some Experience

A - Advanced Skills/Extensive Experience

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fact and Opinion | N | B | F | A |
| Inferences | N | B | F | A |
| Purpose and Tone | N | B | F | A |
| Bias and Propaganda | N | B | F | A |

# APPENDIX C

## PRINCIPLES OF MEMORY

## Appendix C

## Principles of Memory

The following general principles will help you to improve your memory if you are willing to make the effort necessary to apply these rules to your actual learning tasks. Remember that memory is a skill, not a gift of intelligence.

1. Try to see the significance of what you are learning. Try to be interested in it, or at least in the value of remembering it.
2. Give the material your attention. Be sure you have it right!
3. Be sure you fully understand the material. (One good test: Can you explain it to someone so they will understand it?)
4. Make up your mind that you will remember - intend to remember.
5. Be confident that you can remember it.
6. Involve your ego, if possible. See how the task relates to you. Does the material please or displease you? Is it important to your self-concept that you know the material?
7. Associate new material with related facts you already know. (Even when new material seems to disagree with previous learning, you have a valuable handle for recalling it later).
8. Organize the material so you can file it in its proper place in your memory. If you have organized carefully, then to remember part of something will enable you to remember the

**Principles of Memory - (continued)**

rest. (When you reach through a door and grab for your dog, it doesn't matter what part of the dog you catch. Whatever part you catch, you can be sure the rest of the dog will come too!)

9. See how what you are learning is a part of a larger whole.

10. If there is a basis for doing so, divide and group your material. Information is best when taken in as "little bunches."

11. Reinforce what you have learned through repetition and usage. You will not remember something you don't use. If you see that you aren't going to use something, you might as well not bother with it.

12. Test yourself repeatedly - "recite" from memory.

13. Spread the material you are going to remember over a period of time in several sessions. Review regularly.

14. Use mnemonic devices and try to visualize in pictures.

15. Use all your senses when reviewing: listen, read, recite out loud, write it down, discuss it with others, form a mental picture.

Remember: Your brain never loses anything! The trick is how to recall information.

# APPENDIX D

# MEMORY CHECKLIST

## Appendix D

## Memory Checklist

The following list of suggestions for improving my comprehension has been followed by:_____
Name of Student

**Place a ___ each time you read**

---------- 1. I made up my mind I was going to remember.

---------- 2. I felt confident I could remember.

---------- 3. I made sure I paid attention to the material by explaining it to someone.

---------- 4. I tried to relate the material to something I already knew.

---------- 5. I saw the significance of the material and tried to be interested in it. (I realized its worth).

---------- 6. I organized the material so I could file it away in its proper place in my memory.

---------- 7. I tested myself repeatedly to make sure I learned it.

---------- 8. I made a mental picture of what I had read.

# APPENDIX E

## IMPROVING YOUR ABILITY TO CONCENTRATE

## Appendix E

## Improving Your Ability to Concentrate

Concentration is the ability to keep your mind on what you are doing. Developing your power of concentration is the first step to becoming a more efficient, careful reader. Unless you are able to keep your mind on what you are reading, you will not be able to understand or remember the material.

The ability to concentrate involves two main abilities:

1. Learning how to reduce distractions
    a. Choose a place with minimal distractions.
    b. Read and study in the same place.
    c. Read at peak periods of attention.
    d. Control the noise level.
    e. Pay attention to your physical state.
    f. Have necessary materials available.
2. Developing skills in focusing your attention
    a. Give yourself a goal.
    b. Choose goals that are easy to accomplish.
    c. Get interested in the subject.
    d. Form a mental picture of what you read.
    e. Vary your activities.
    f. Keep a distractions list.

**REMEMBER:** Setting a goal and rewarding yourself when you achieve it is often an effective way of forcing yourself to keep your mind on your work. Getting yourself interested

**Improving Your Ability to Concentrate -(continued)**

in the subject also aids in concentration. Concentration can also be improved by a concerted effort to build your attention span - the length of time you are able to focus on your subject without distraction.

# APPENDIX F

## HOW TO BE AN ACTIVE READER

## Appendix F

## How to be an Active Reader

If you are like many college students today, you may think that it is too late to develop new reading habits or you may think that you don't even want to. But it may be important for you to know that it is not too late to learn the importance of reading for ideas; by making associations with what you already know about a topic and the material that you are reading; by predicting what an author might say about a topic; by making connections and recognizing structure; and by defining purpose and understanding the author's intent.

An active reader gains knowledge by looking for answers to questions. Questioning leads the reader to an awareness of the author's strategies and enables the reader to extract meanings, whether stated or implied. The reader will also be able to evaluate the author's ideas. Knowing what questions to ask will result in becoming an **ACTIVE READER.**

# APPENDIX G

## SAMPLE MASTERY TEST - INFERENCES

## Appendix G

## Sample Mastery Test - Inferences

**Directions:** The passage below is followed by five statements. Two of these statements are inferences that can definitely be made on the basis of the information in the selection. The three other statements are questionable - they are not fully supported by the facts given. Put **D** beside inferences that **DEFINITELY CAN BE MADE** and **Q** beside inferences that are **QUESTIONABLE.**

I guess I did it because I hadn't studied very much. It seemed so easy because everyone knew that Mr. Brown kept his office door unlocked. It was just too bad things didn't work out for me. Now my classmates are mad at me because they must restudy for the new test Mr. Brown is making up. My parents have taken away my car keys. Even worse, I'll have to go to summer school for biology.

_____a. The speaker stole a test.

_____b. The speaker had been failing the course.

_____c. The class was a biology class.

_____d. The speaker regrets not studying more.

_____e. The speaker will never cheat again.

# APPENDIX H

## STRATEGY DEFINITION SHEET

## Appendix H

## Strategy Definition Sheet

**A. Observable study methods**

1. **Highlight or underline**

2. **Outline** - organize ideas on paper in categories or under headings to show which are the main ideas and which are supporting ideas or examples.

**B. In-the-head study methods**

1. **Skimming/Scanning** - this is a very fast type of reading. It involves either reading for the main ideas in order to get an overview of the passage, or moving very quickly over unimportant information.

2. **Special attention!!** - review or memorize - concentrate on specific information; memorizing, reading aloud, and going back over notes or underlinings.

3. **Put together ideas in your head** - summarize the information in your head, stop to get whole picture, or to connect ideas.

4. **Relate ideas to what you already know** - create associations between a new idea and something you already know or have experienced.

5. **Make a mental picture in your mind** - imagine a picture of a place, object, or event.

6. **Question or test yourself** - think of questions and answer them as you read. Test your comprehension and memory.

7. **Guess what will happen???** - make predictions about what will happen next or what the reading will be about.

# APPENDIX I

## RECORD OF READING STRATEGIES USED

## Appendix I

## Record of Reading Strategies Used

| | Passages | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th | 7th | 8th |
| **Observable Strategies** | | | | | | | | |
| Highlight | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| Underline | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| Outline | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| **Mental (In-the-Head) Strategies** | | | | | | | | |
| Look over | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| Memorize | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| Summarize | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| Relate to what you know | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| Picture | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| Question | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |
| Predict | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ | ___ |

# APPENDIX J

## READING PERFORMANCE CHART

## Appendix J

## Reading Performance Chart

**Directions:** Keep track of your progress by entering your scores on the Mastery Tests for each of the four skills listed below. Check your performance at the end of each reading selection in your text (selections will be pre-determined by your instructor). This will enable you to get a good view of your overall performance as you work through your text.

### Mastery Test Scores

| | Inferences | Fact/ Opinion | Purpose/ Tone | Bias/ Propaganda |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 2 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 3 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 5 | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

### Reading Selection Scores

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | _____ | 6 | _____ | 11 | _____ | 16 | _____ |
| 2 | _____ | 7 | _____ | 12 | _____ | 17 | _____ |
| 3 | _____ | 8 | _____ | 13 | _____ | 18 | _____ |
| 4 | _____ | 9 | _____ | 14 | _____ | 19 | _____ |
| 5 | _____ | 10 | _____ | 15 | _____ | 20 | _____ |

# APPENDIX K

## SAMPLE MASTERY TEST - FACT AND OPINION

## Appendix K

### Sample Mastery Test - Fact and Opinion

**Directions:** Some of the sentences below state facts and some express opinions. Identify statements of fact with an **F** and statements of opinion with an **O**.

_____1. Some married couples take separate vacations.

_____2. In point of fact, it is always better for spouses to vacation together.

_____3. It's going to rain today.

_____4. The weather report in this morning's newspaper says that rain is likely today.

_____5. When my dog barks at someone she knows, she often wags her tail at the same time.

_____6. It would be nice to have more than twenty-four hours in a day.

_____7. Bessie Smith, known as the "Empress of the Blues," was killed in a car accident in 1937. _____8. There is simply no cause for being late.

_____9. Any student who walked into our biology class after the bell rang was marked late.

_____10. More American businesses should open daycare centers for their employees' children.

# APPENDIX L

## STUDENT SELF-PERCEPTION SURVEY

## Appendix L

## Student Self-Perception Survey

**Directions:** Underline one response for each question.

1. Can you read with good comprehension?

(a) Often (b) Sometimes (c) Rarely (d) Never

2. Do you think you can improve your reading grade?

(a) Very Surely (b) Surely (c) Not so Sure (d) Not at All

3. If you get better grades, do you think you will read more often for pleasure?

(a) Very Surely (b) Surely (c) Not so Sure (d) Not at All

4. On a daily basis, approximately how much time do you spend reading for pleasure?

(a) Two Hours (b) One Hour (c) 30 minutes (d) No Time

5. If you increase the amount of reading you do, do you think you will become a more successful student?

(a) Very Surely (b) Surely (c) Not so Sure (d) Not at All

# APPENDIX M

## SAMPLE MASTERY TEST - BIAS AND PROPAGANDA

## Appendix M

### Sample Mastery Test - Bias and Propaganda

**Directions:** Read each of the sentences below and then circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

A. 1. Everyone who wants to live and work in the United States has an obligation to learn English. 2. Anything less is an insult to this country. 3. English has always been the dominant language in the United States and this common language is what has made our country great. 4. Irresponsible critics of the legislation we propose have charged that we want to suppress the cultures of minority groups. 5. In fact, we respect and admire the diverse groups that make up this great country. 6. We ask only that these groups give up all their ill-advised loyalty to their native languages.

1. Which of the following groups of words contains biased language?

   a. live, country, native
   b. insult, irresponsible, ill-advised
   c. common, critics, minority
   d. language, cultures, country

2. Which of the sentences in the passage contains a half-truth?

   a. sentence 1
   b. sentence 3
   c. sentence 5
   d. sentence 6

**Appendix M**

**Sample Mastery Test - Bias and Propaganda**

**(continued)**

B. 1. Throughout the century, the percentage of students who fail to graduate from high school has been decreasing, but more than three quarters of a million students still drop out of school each year. 2. Teenagers with poor attendance, low grades, and low-income backgrounds are more at risk of dropping out. 3. Teachers who care can inspire troubled teens who might otherwise tragically end up on society's rubbish heap - dropouts without dreams and without a future. 4. By keeping a close watch on students' progress and working closely with parents and administrators, teachers can help keep these students in school. 5. A good teacher can always succeed in developing strategies designed to ensure a continued commitment to education.

1. Which propaganda technique is used in sentence 5?
   a. name calling
   b. glittering generalities
   c. plain folks
   d. bandwagon

2. Which of the publications listed below is most likely to be the source of this passage?
   a. a brochure distributed to students considered to be potential dropouts

## Appendix M

**Sample Mastery Test - Bias and Propaganda**

**(continued)**

b. an open letter to all parents of students enrolled in an urban high school

c. a textbook for college students preparing to become teachers

d. a newspaper article about a local school system

# APPENDIX N

## SAMPLE MASTERY TEST - PURPOSE AND TONE

## Appendix N

### Sample Mastery Test - Purpose and Tone

**Directions:** This activity will give you practice in recognizing purpose and tone. Read the paragraph below. Then carefully consider the questions that follow and circle the best responses.

A successful doctor is scheduled to operate on a patient at 8 A.M., but it has snowed during the night and driving is difficult. Do you think the doctor will stay at home in bed? He won't if he's a professional. This attitude of professionalism is the key to being a successful college student. It is within your reach no matter how well or how poorly you have done in school up until now. You cannot undo the past, but you can adopt an attitude of professionalism from now on. All you have to do is intend to take school seriously and the rest will follow. By attending classes, turning in assignments on time, and coming prepared for tests, you will gradually build your skills.

1. The primary purpose of this paragraph is to
   a. present facts on student behavior.
   b. persuade students to be responsible.
   c. describe to readers the virtues of professionalism.
   d. classify students.

## Appendix N

## Sample Mastery Test - Purpose and Tone

## (continued)

2. In general, the tone of this paragraph can be described as

a. critical.

b. pessimistic.

c. encouraging.

d. praising.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to thank Dr. Leah Nachman for her continued support and guidance throughout the entire practicum process. Her patience, kindness, and encouragement served as the motivating force to keep me moving ahead toward completion of this project.

Special thanks to the Associate Dean of Communications, Ms. Gina Cortes-Suarez, Department Chair Basic Skills, Dr. Michaela Segall, Mr. Don Meagher, and Reading Lab Supervisor, Mrs. Evelyn Jordan who encouraged and inspired me throughout the practicum experience.

Additional thanks must be made to my sweet, loving, and patient children and grandchildren who made many sacrifices so that I could complete my studies.

Irma Darrow Doughty